Antenatal corticosteroids for women at risk of preterm birth

What is this systematic review about?
Antenatal steroids, compared with placebo or no treatment, given to pregnant women at risk of giving birth before 37 weeks.

What evidence did we find?
27 randomised trials including 11,272 women

15 trials: singleton pregnancies only
12 trials: included multiple pregnancies
10 trials: from middle- and lower-income countries
17 studies: high-income countries
19 studies: used a single course of steroids
8 studies: used either single course or repeated doses

What are the effects of antenatal corticosteroids?

For babies: high-certainty evidence
➢ 2.3% fewer perinatal deaths
➢ 2.6% fewer neonatal deaths
➢ 4.3% fewer cases of respiratory distress syndrome

Little to no difference in birthweight

For babies: moderate-certainty evidence
➢ 1.4% fewer cases of intraventricular haemorrhage

For mothers: moderate-certainty evidence

Probably little to no difference in:
➢ Maternal deaths
➢ Chorioamnionitis
➢ Endometritis

What does this mean?
A single course of antenatal steroids reduces the risk of serious respiratory illness and death in neonates in low-middle- and high-income countries.

More detailed data are needed for certain high-risk groups (e.g. multiple pregnancies, pregnant women with diabetes or hypertension).

Evidence up to date: Sept 2020